



PIERLUISI INTRODUCES LEGISLATION FOR VETERANS
Seeks equal treatment in military health coverage
Tuesday, March 31, 2009

WASHINGTON, DC- The Resident Commissioner in Washington, Pedro Pierluisi, today introduced a bill that would essentially require the Department of Defense to provide the same health services that are available in the states to thousands of military retirees and their dependents in Puerto Rico and Guam.

The measure—co-sponsored by the delegate from Guam, Madeleine Bordallo, who is a member of the House Armed Services Committee—would benefit about 22,000 military retirees in Puerto Rico who are under age 65, along with their dependents.

Under current law, military retirees in Puerto Rico and Guam who have not reached age 65 are eligible only for the TRICARE Standard program, not the TRICARE Prime program, which provides services at lower cost and gives priority access to beneficiaries at military health facilities.

The military retirees in Guam and Puerto Rico are not eligible because the territories are considered by the Department of Defense to be "overseas" locations.

"Although the Department of Defense has the authority under current law to extend TRICARE Prime to Puerto Rico and Guam without congressional action, the department has so far declined to do so, at times arguing that there is an inadequate health infrastructure on the two islands to support expansion," Pierluisi explained.

This is the first time that any member of Congress has sought a legislative solution to this problem.

"TRICARE Prime is the gold standard for military health programs. When given the choice between the two alternatives, retirees usually choose Prime over Standard. But not a single retiree in Puerto Rico and Guam is even offered this choice," the Resident Commissioner said.

"The American citizens of Puerto Rico and Guam have proven again and again that they are willing to risk their lives for the country. When their service ends, our veterans should be treated with the same honor and respect as their fellow veterans in the states. To deny them equal treatment is wrong and unfair," Pierluisi said.

This measure has the support of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), the Veterans' House of Puerto Rico, the American Legion of Puerto Rico, the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), and Puerto Rico's Public Advocate for Veterans' Affairs, Jorge Más, all of whom have asked Pierluisi to intervene in this situation.

<http://pierluisi.house.gov>